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CHILD LABOR IN THE OHIO VALLEY STATES

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Arguing from their very wide acceptance, we may conclude that compulsory education and the regulation of child labor are factors in the progress of the state. These two factors bear directly upon the family, and as the rearing of families is unquestionably another factor in progress we have a situation in which two elements affect another element, compelling on the one hand and restraining on the other.

Such compulsion and restraint are matters of no concern to families in comfortable circumstances, as their provisions are easily complied with. But no law designed to do the greatest good to the greatest number has ever been enacted that did not work hardship upon a few. Compulsory education and the regulation of child labor affect adversely the immediate interests of some poverty-stricken families, and for this reason some states blindly and illogically exempt the children of such families from the operation of the law. It seems not to have occurred to these states that their poor boys and girls are the very ones who, of all children, need most such care and protection. As a matter of simple justice, compulsory and restrictive laws should be supplemented by other measures which provide for such cases of hardship as they occasion. In other words, the various factors in progress should be made to operate harmoniously. Such provision is made by the state of Ohio.

This state directs its boards of education, upon recommendation of truant officers, to furnish text books free of charge to children of compulsory school age whose earnings are needed to support either themselves or others dependent upon them, and also to furnish the families of such children with such additional relief as may be necessary to enable the children to continue in school until they are legally qualified to go to work. The money for such relief is paid out of the contingent funds of each school district, and the law contains a statement to the effect that no child shall be

considered or declared a pauper by reason of his acceptance of such aid.

Here is a practical and satisfactory way of making the operation of compulsory education and child labor laws justifiable and harmonious in their bearing upon poverty-stricken families. In Cincinnati the Board of Education has made arrangements with the local Associated Charities to have all cases reported by truant officers investigated by the trained social workers of that organization. Relief will be afforded only when recommended by them. Many statesmen and students of sociology claim that this is paternalism. Perhaps it is, but when one considers the hope this provision holds out to the unfortunate children of the state, it seems more like maternalism.

Wherever the enactment of laws further to restrict child labor is under consideration, there is invariably raised the objection that such restriction would work harm to the poor and bring increased hardship to the widows and orphans. To a limited extent this is undoubtedly true, but the suffering is far less extensive than popularly supposed, and such cases are the exception rather than the rule. Restrictive legislation in the early stages of its enforcement is practically sure to work hardship to a few individuals, but the fact that, all things being equal, the condition of these same individuals will ultimately improve, should not be overlooked. Moreover, the introduction of labor-saving machinery into any factory is always attended by a reduction in the number of operatives, yet no intelligent person advances this as an argument against the use of such machinery. Neither should child labor legislation be opposed because of the temporary suffering it entails upon a few.

It is frequently urged in West Virginia that child labor in and about the mining village of Monongah is justifiable because of the terrible disaster that occurred there in December, 1907. As a result of the explosion in the coal mines 359 employees were killed, and the opponents of child labor restriction still point to that grief-stricken village, and claim that the widows must have the earnings of their little children in order to live. The population of this village is less than 2000, and in such a small community the sudden death of 359 wage-earners naturally resulted in a very distressing situation. However, it is interesting to know that only three children were made full orphans by the disaster, and that through the

work of the official relief committee and other benevolent organizations in aiding the sufferers to care for themselves, there was in December, 1908, one year after the explosion, not a single child in Monongah under the age of fourteen years whose earnings were needed either to support himself or to supplement the family income.

The law in Ohio, though excellent in many respects, affords no protection whatever to children engaged in street trades. Little boys and girls are allowed to sell newspapers, fruits, baskets, chewing-gum, and any other merchandise in the streets and public places of every town and city in the state without any restriction. This freedom from all restraint is particularly objectionable in cities, as children there are subjected to exposure and hardships and too frequently come under the influence of people who have no regard for their welfare. Children are forced by their parents to sell goods in the markets both before and after school hours, and during half the night, while on Saturdays they cry their wares from early morning until midnight, and neither the state nor the municipality has so far attempted to protect them. Little newsboys also may work from early morning until late at night, as there is no restriction that applies to them. In cities having newspapers between which there is keen rivalry as to circulation, the newsboys lead a miserable life. The men employed to distribute newspapers to the boys are often chosen because of their brutal aggressiveness, and the little fellows at best get but rough treatment at their hands. If the state does not include in the child labor law some provision defining the age under which children shall not engage in the various street trades, the individuals and societies in every community interested in the welfare of children can at least put forth an effort to improve their local situation by urging the passage of a municipal ordinance.

Ohio has a well-organized force of thirty-four factory inspectors, who are charged with the enforcement of the child labor law in addition to their other duties. This force includes eight women, whose duty is to inspect the conditions under which women and children work. In the other states of the Ohio Valley district the situation is not nearly so good. In Indiana the child labor law is far behind the laws of other progressive states, and there are only six officials in the Department of Factory Inspection charged with its enforcement. In West Virginia the compulsory education law is excellent, but the child labor law has two different age limits, each

applying to different localities at different seasons of the year. There is no prohibition of night work, no educational requirement, no limitation as to work hours, and no requirement as to proof of age. Moreover, there is only one official whose duty it is to enforce the laws relating to child labor, the employment of women, sanitation, and the use of devices for the protection of employees from dangerous machinery. This official is expected also to direct the affairs of his office in Wheeling, and to conduct a free employment bureau!

The situation in Kentucky is peculiar, and can best be illustrated by the statement of a farmer who resides in the blue-grass region of the state. This man realizes the gravity of the child labor situation in his vicinity, and knows that some action must be taken. Several years ago he sold a little corner of his farm to a man who is sober and hard-working, and who has been trying his best to pay for his nine-hundred-dollar home. He has cultivated the land for five or six years, and during this time has been assisted by three little boys who have been working in the fields in the summer, cultivating the crop and picking worms from the tobacco plants, and in the barns in the winter, handling the gathered leaves. Formerly these boys attended school in September and October, but for several years past the work on the farm has been such that they have not been in school at all. With all this child labor the man has been unable to pay \$500 on his home in five years, and within the past few months he was obliged to borrow \$100.

This same farmer related another instance in which his tenant worked his little girls in the fields during the late summer and autumn terms of the district school. His landlord learned of this, and purchased books for the children, and they were sent to school, but in a few days they were found again at work in the field. When the father was questioned about the matter he said that men demanded \$1.50 per day as wages for field labor, and as he could not pay so much his children must work or he would lose money.

This Kentuckian stated also that some time ago he had a tenant with a wife and five children. The youngest child was an infant, and was daily laid upon a quilt in a fence corner while the rest of the family worked in the field eating merely a cold lunch at noon. This man never sent a child to school, and at the end of the year, after having sold his crop, he still owed his landlord \$67 more than the crop sold for. This in the blue-grass region of Kentucky!

These instances can be multiplied indefinitely, and the most casual investigation will show hundreds of wives and children working daily in the fields or in the barns, according to the season, accumulating nothing, and barely making a living.

A visitor in the great tobacco factories of Kentucky finds there boys and girls working as "hangers" and "pluggers", performing simple labor and receiving little pay. The nimble fingers of children accomplish more in a given time at these simple tasks than can men or women, yet these little workers receive less wages than men would at the same labor. Child labor is profitable from a temporary business point of view, and so the evil grows. A boy works ten hours a day, taking the hands of tobacco out of the hogsheads and hanging them upon sticks, which are then put into the drying machine, or in fastening the company's trademark on the plugs of tobacco. This work does not fit him for anything else, and when he becomes old enough to demand higher wages his place is taken by some other boy, and he has to begin again at the bottom at some other kind of work. All this time he is being deprived of the benefits of education.

Illiteracy can never be stamped out until these conditions are removed. There is living in the best agricultural part of the state an American family composed of nineteen members, not one of whom can read or write, or even sign his name. In the country Sunday schools it is a pitiable sight to see the little children joining in the hymns quite lustily, and then vanishing away when the lesson books are opened, because they cannot read and are ashamed to have anyone see how ignorant they are. There are underlying causes for all the ills of which Kentucky has reason to complain, and the situation can be improved only after the people have awakened and realize their moral responsibility.

An aroused intelligent public opinion is the only thing that can remedy the situation in Kentucky, as elsewhere. This alone proves that the public school plays the most important part in improving conditions. The public school educates the masses, and it is the intelligent public opinion of the masses that not only regulates the government, but makes the country a fit place to live in. In this connection it is very discouraging to read in an editorial published recently in the organ of an important industry in this country, the statement that, as no boy could live on a knowledge of reading,

writing and arithmetic, and as one man might be very learned and yet not decent enough to behave himself, while another man might be absolutely illiterate and still be a model husband and father, the paper opposed education for working people, and, if it could, would remove every educational requirement from the statute books. When anyone asked for employment it would only look at his teeth and examine his stomach! It is almost incredible that an American citizen in this enlightened day and age, and in this progressive country of ours, could put into cold print such an absurd, reactionary statement. It smacks more of the Dark Ages than of the twentieth century.

This same mistake of denying to the working people the benefits of education is what brought Spain down from her position as the proudest nation of all, to that of one of the least among the communities of the world. A few hundred years ago Spain ruled over the greatest empire in the history of the world, and it was this same denial of the right of education to her common people that brought on all the disasters which have shorn her of her power and brought her down to humiliation and defeat. There can be no enlightened public opinion without public education, and without enlightened public opinion a nation cannot prosper. Child labor and education do not go hand in hand. The one works against the other.

Someone has said, "Show me your companions and I will tell you what you are." So it may be said of wages, "Tell me the amount of the family's income, and I will describe the condition of its members." Child labor will not increase the family's income, neither can it improve its condition. Its benefits are short-lived, its ill effects are lasting. The family is the recognized unit of our civilization. Whatever attacks the integrity of the family undermines our civilization and impels our whole social structure to its fall. There are many agencies that weaken the influence of the home and break the "tie that binds," and of these the premature employment of children ranks among the most effective. The child's spirit of independence normally reaches its full development upon the arrival of the child at years of discretion, and then the time is ripe for him to withdraw from the shelter and protection his parents afford and to take his place in the great scheme of society, supported by the ideals that home life has instilled into his soul and strength-

ened by the discipline and training that were his in childhood and in youth. But if this spirit is developed at too early an age, as is the case when a child becomes a wage-earner, his respect for parental authority is lessened, the relationship between parent and child is thereby weakened, and the disintegration of the home begins. Delinquency among juveniles and idleness and pauperism among adults are the outcome in large measure of child labor. To the truth of this claim judges, probation officers, superintendents of reformatory institutions and social workers of every kind will abundantly subscribe.

Prosperity in any locality can exist only when the amount of wealth produced there exceeds the amount consumed. So the individual laborer increases the wealth and prosperity of his country according to the amount by which the wealth created by him exceeds his consumption of the same. An unskilled laborer cannot create more wealth than he consumes, and as child labor is essentially unskilled labor, the employment of children in gainful occupations is a menace to prosperity. But allow the children to become fully developed, provide for their proper education and training while young, and when they enter the field of labor properly equipped in body and in mind, they become a real factor in the making of prosperity and society realizes bountifully on its investment. Inasmuch as we add to the power of a child, he becomes an asset; inasmuch as we take away from his power he becomes a liability.